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ABSTRACT

Media content analysts seldom observe the principle that editorial omissions are as telling as what is published or broadcast; hence, the purpose of this paper is to explore, and thus stimulate debate about, editorial omissions or "strategic silence." It is observed that as a concept, strategic silence embraces both tact and strategy--the former being an institution process that produces images and symbols appropriate to the larger process whereby journal and readers make sense of the world. It is further observed that although the resulting version of reality may be regarded as the end product of a conspiracy of silence, it should be understood as the production of meanings based not only upon manifest content but also upon ways in which some things are either not seen or not recorded because of the social transaction between readers and producers of editorial matter. Next, the paper explores the discordance between historical and social science methods in terms of its implications for the search for strategic silence, which should be conducted in accord with tested historical principles of avoiding presentism and collating evidence. Finally, the paper offers illustrations of strategic silence drawn from a study of the symbolic portraits of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that were sketched by "Time," "Newsweek," and "U.S. News & World Report" magazines. (HTH)

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THE SEARCH FOR STRATEGIC SILENCE

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Like the dog that did not bark, thus presenting Sherlock Holmes with an important bit of evidence, editorial omissions may tell the historian quite as much as what was published or broadcast. The logic of that principle of evidence is inescapable, and, and of course, historians and social scientists readily subscribe to it. In practice, however, it less often observed by those who analyze media content.

There are, no doubt, numerous reasons why a principle should be at once so heartily endorsed and so seldom honored in the act. One reason is the ambiguity that seems to hover about such an enterprise; at first blush, it appears to rest uneasily upon a shifting base of impressionistic research rather than rigorous analysis, especially quantitative analysis. Still another is the paradoxical nature of attempting to establish that something is significant precisely <u>because</u> it did not find its way into print or the airwaves. Taken by itself, the lingering influence of the effects paradigm, which for decades channeled debate about mass communication primarily into an exceedingly narrow perspective, that of decision-making, would render such a research strategy suspect. If, for example, powerful media effects are assumed to exist, the researcher is forced into the all but untenable position of arguing that some bit of unpublished information <u>would</u> have had an effect had it seen the light of day. Conversely, if media effects are regarded as limited, the intellectual discourse ranges no further afield, the critique is flipped to the other side of the coin, and the paradigm-reproducing question reappears in this form: Why bother to study editorial omissions when even that which is published has demonstrably little impact?

Finally, there is another problem that this paper attempts to redress in part. It is the awkward, usually fitful convergence of historical and social science methods (and perspectives as well) that additionally retards the investigation of significant gaps in media content.

The purpose of this paper is to explore, thus stimulate debate about editorial omissions. More precisely, these should be regarded as instances of strategic silence, inasmuch as the first term merely describes that which cannot be avoided by journalists and others engaged in the processing of raw material into media presentations. As a concept, strategic silence embraces both tactic and strategy, the former being an institutional process that produces images and symbols appropriate to the larger process whereby journal and readers make sense of the world. The version of reality thus constructed may be regarded as the end product of a conspiracy of silence, but more properly should be understood as the production of meanings based not only upon manifest content but upon ways in which some things are not seen, or if seen, not recorded, for reasons related to the social transaction between readers and producers of editorial matter.

The first part of the paper explores the discordance between historical and social science methods in terms of its implications for the search for strategic silence. The second suggests that the search should be conducted in accord with the tested historical principles of avoiding presentism and collating evidence. The third offers illustrations of strategic silence drawn from my study of the symbolic portraits of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., that were sketched by Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News & World Report.

The Problem of Methods

In conducting the search for episodes of strategic silence, the problem is not the lack of methodological principles; indeed, these are firmly established in historical scholarship, and guidance is available as well from the social sciences. Extending them into the realm of strategic silence has been another matter.

One barrier exists because of a disjunction in historical methods. Media content is approached by historians in distinct, usually discrepant ways. Most historians set out to recreate an event or series of events, to reconstruct the life of an actor on history's stage, or to trace the social, political, or intellectual influence of thought. For them, content is grist to be milled. It is sifted for facts pertinent to their inquiries, these being subjected to such established and essentially commonsensical tests of truth of falsity, accuracy or the lack thereof, and the residue is thereafter discarded. By contrast, historians of mass communication commonly work from a different research agenda less tied to the assumption of media content as literal representations of reality. The evidence is the same, the questions historians ask of it differ. But the guiding principles of historical methodology arose out of the needs of the first strategy, not the second, and, it should be conceded, historians of journalism and mass communication have made only scattered methodological contributions to the craft they practice.

The situation improves, though not always markedly, when attention is turned to the social sciences and the two major approaches to content, quantitative analysis and textual analysis.

Content analysts generally take as their province recurring patterns of published content, despite the admonition by, among others, Budd, Thorp, and

Donohew, that what is not published in a given medium may be as or more important than what is.[1] In principle, there may be no absolute bar to building a measure of strategic silence into quantitative content analysis, but in practice, the necessary rigidity of the method at least discourages such inquiries, and perhaps rules them out as altogether impracticable, given the constraints of time and money available for research.

Textual analysis of the literary/linguistic sort is more supple. Like content analysts, textual analysts use recurrence as one critical dimension of significance; recurring patterns, as Stuart Hall puts the case, serve as pointers to latent meanings in content.[2] More to the point for the purposes of this paper, the textual analyst, in Hall's incised phrase, has another string attached to his bow,

> namely, strategies for noting and taking account of emphasis. Position, placing, treatment, tone, stylistic intensification, striking imagery, etc., are all ways of registering emphasis. The really significant item may not be the one which continually recurs, but the one which stands out as an exception from the general pattern--but which is also given, in its exceptional context, the greatest weight.[3]

The importance that Hall assigns to the exceptional item underscores one of the strengths that makes textual analysis the better choice for the historian whose concern is grappling with rather than reducing what Todd Gitlin describes as "the complexity and contradictoriness of media artifacts."[4]

The basic strategies of textual analysis are selection, emphasis, and exclusion, although the first two engage most of the energies of researchers. This is as it should be: Analysis of texts is just that--analysis firmly anchored to historical evidence that presents itself in a given form. That said, other matters require exploration. Each strategy reverberates against the other. Editorial silence, for example, often is heard most clearly

against content that is published, whether patterned or exceptive. At the same time, selection and emphasis logically cannot be separated from exclusion: Some judgment is required as well about what is not selected, what is accorded lesser or no emphasis in order to plumb the richness of textual details; often, the element of exclusion appears only implicitly, lacking the hard edge of scholarly rigor despite Hall's notation that the analysis should indicate in detail "why one rather than another reading of the material seems to the analyst the most plausible way of understanding it."[5]

Textual analysis offers the potential of rich insights into media content. Yet a number of snares line the path, because the research problem often is thrust into the indifferently charted territory where history and social science meet, and methodological concordance is elusive.

Guiding Principles

The fundamental principle that should guide the search for strategic silence is simple: The scholar must take care not to read back into the past knowledge that exists later. Put another way, the historian should establish the probability that the information in question was available to the newspaper, magazine, or broadcasting station or network, which did not publish or otherwise disseminate it. Thereafter, attention is turned to the task of fixing the significance of the episode of strategic silence, a matter that often, though not invariably, requires the skills honed in the historian's work of tracking problems across time.

It is at the initial point that the critique of rationalized impressionism becomes harshest. Confronting it requires consciousness of the nature of historical inquiry and, as well, the rule of parsimony in research

generally. To begin, the standard of historical research is not certainty but probability that unfolds into verisimilitude. The noted quantitative historian William O. Aydelotte made a not totally unrelated point with his observation that quantitative procedures cannot "achieve finality and eliminate subjective judgment," and cautioned that such methods should not be regarded as "precluding the use of speculation, imagination, intuition, [and] logic."[6]

The principle of parsimony is, of course, not to be as precise as possible, but to be as imprecise as the nature of the problem permits. That principle logically extends to the necessity of differential tests of reliability and validity; in sum, evidence is weighed against the demands of a discipline. Historians need not arraign themselves as heretics before their colleagues in the social sciences whose demand is for rigorously precise statement (to pluck one example from a number of possibilities) of plus or minus three percentage points as a measure of the range of possible error in findings generated by a public opinion survey. In certain of the hard sciences, such a statement of potential error would be regarded as indicative of rampant speculation. The rule that governs is, of course, the capacity for precision in a given discipline, and the rigorous determination of the degree of acceptable imprecision.

This determination is, or should be made with ready acknowledgement of the limitations imposed by the particular research question. And, as H. Stuart Hughes instructs us, the terrain of history may be exceedingly uneven when it comes to the search for evidence:

> The neat coverage of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century documentation has quite vanished. In some respect, the historian of today is in the happiest situation his breed has ever enjoyed. (Yet in this too-ample pasture the honest admit that they are reduced to selective grazing.)

> Elsewhere, the contemporary historian may be no better off than the medievalist struggling with an almost total documentary gap.[7]

The choice thus comes into sharper focus. The pertinent research questions can simply be discarded because of imperfect methods--scarcely a shortcoming unique to the craft of the historian—or the scholar may attempt to master the limitations dictated by the capacity of the discipline or imposed by the research question.

The Search for Strategic Silence

Mastering those limitations in the specific case of strategic silence may on occasion require minimum effort. Reasoning from the nature of the event or the visibility of the dramatis personae or both, the scholar may quickly accomplish the first step of establishing the availability of the pertinent information, thus avoiding presentism.

As an example, there was the treatment accorded Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by Newsweek on the occasion of the signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. As was entirely appropriate, President Johnson dominated the ceremony symbolically in the magazine's account. What stuck out, however, was the fact that Newsweek did not even mention that King was present at the ceremony. The omission was in marked contrast to the important role that Newsweek assigned King at the ceremony marking the signing into law of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.[8]

As the winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace the previous year, King was the most visible black leader in America in 1965. Just as important was his leadership of the Selma campaign a few months before, which generated enormous public pressure for passage of federal voting rights legislation. Newsweek's silence was all the more striking because of quotations from Johnson and other

references to the Selma campaign by Newsweek itself. Almost certainly, the information that King attended the ceremony was available to Newsweek, but the magazine chose not to use it.

The significance of silence can be traced to the sense of uneasiness that King was causing Newsweek at the time. King had already taken his first tentative steps into the anti-war movement in the post-Selma period, urging that the United States and North Vietnam negotiate an end to the war. In addition, King had begun to extend his civil rights activities to regions outside the South after the successful conclusion of the Selma campaign. Newsweek was disturbed by both developments, and the episode of strategic silence was one manifestation of its uneasiness with the new activism of King.

King disturbed U.S. New & World Report on numerous occasions, and sometimes the magazine responded with strategic silence. It did so, for example, when it reported the Watts riot in Los Angeles in 1965. King had visited Watts in an unsuccessful attempt to stop the rioting. U.S. News did not report that King was even in the vicinity, a matter of which it could scarcely have been unaware, given King's visibility as a newsmaker and the extensive press and broadcast reports of the Watts riot and its aftermath. The hitch was that King had assumed, albeit unsuccessfully, the persona of the peacemaker. To have reported that King was trying to dampen the fires in Watts would have contradicted the magazine's theme that King was stirring up trouble wherever he went.[9]

Another useful principle of historical methodology is collation--bringing together, thus comparing evidence. Obviously, the most direct way of doing this is to compare what was actually printed or broadcast with, for example, the unedited story submitted by a reporter in the field. Alternatively, the

researcher may interview the reporter who filed the original dispatch in order to compare his or her account with the one finally published. A number of difficulties may present themselves when this commonsense strategy is adopted, one being the assumption that there will be a significant disparity between what is filed and what printed, which has been called into question by studies of the routines of journalistic organization.[10]

Another problem has become all too familiar to the historian, who is ruefully aware that evidence both appears and disappears with the passage of time, and more often vanishes than surfaces. A witness may have died, for example, or the evidence may have been destroyed or lost. Even if the information exists, access to it may be denied: newspapers and other media organizations usually resist fiercely attempts by governmental agencies or private parties to delve into their files, whether out of the fear of legal penalties or criticism of the ways they carry out their journalistic responsibilties or a combination of both, and often regard with no greater enthusiasm the petitions of scholars to secure access to journalistic "out-takes" and other documentary records related to news-gathering and editorial judgments.

If access is blocked or the results are otherwise unsatisfactory, other strategies must be devised. One fruitful method is cross-media comparison. Under some circumstances, the appearance of the omitted material elsewhere in the news media may provide hard evidence of strategic silence.

An example may illustrate this premise. At one point it became necessary to analyze Time's and Newsweek's reports of the speech delivered by King when he accepted the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964. I was interested in establishing what the two magazines did not report, as well as what they

emphasized, and this required some reasonable assurance that they had access to the full text of his address.

Cross-media collation made it possible to state with some confidence that the complete text indeed was available to Time and Newsweek. It was relatively easy to locate two points of comparison. The first was the existence of a contemporaneous dispatch of the full text of the address that was filed on the Associated Press wire; almost beyond question, the AP's story was received by the two news magazines. The second bit of evidence was that the dispatch was printed by the New York Times, the newspaper that exercises an overweening influence on American journalism, print or broadcast, including the news magazines.[11] Even had the AP dispatch escaped the attention of the editors and researchers of the two magazines, an unlikely event in itself, the publication of the story by the Times almost certainly would have caught their attention.

Thereafter, attention could be turned to fixing the significance of the episode of strategic silence. What the two magazines omitted from their accounts of the Nobel laureate speech was as revealing as what they published. Silence was maintained when it came to the remarks of King concerning the "debilitating and grinding poverty [that] afflicts my people and chains them to the lowest rung of the economic ladder," and other of his statements that drew lines of association between African struggles against colonialism and the black struggle for freedom in the South; even an innocuous tribute to Gandhian nonviolence was omitted.[12]

The two magazines quoted King accurately, but limiting the analysis to accuracy bypasses the crux of the matter. King's other notions would not have fitted so neatly into the theme threaded through the coverage. It was this:

While King and the foot soldiers of the civil rights movement were being honored with the Nobel Prize, so also was America; America was being honored for living up to its ideals, for hastening the dawning of the day when the black Southerner would know the blessings of liberty. If there was much truth to this interpretation, equally as much went unsaid. Already, as both Time and Newsweek had recognized, the black movement had burst its bounds, spilling out of the South in 1963 and into the rest of the nation in hundreds of demonstrations, thereby setting in motion a new, far more militant phase of the black struggle that would be directed as much against de facto discrimination throughout America as de jure segregation in the South, and would soon produce some of the bloodiest riots in American history. The thrust of King's unquoted statements would have been more unsettling to the magazines' affluent and centrist readers than a moral epic chanted in bardic tones.

It should be noted, of course, that it is not sufficient merely to establish that a story with the pertinent information appeared in print or was broadcast; the critical point is whether this bears on the availability of the information to the organization under study. And, to be sure, the excellent index published by the Times made it possible to locate the points of collation quickly and efficiently. But indexes are not always essential. The same search could have been accomplished by bracketing--examining content in other media within a given time frame before and after the date of the news event.

In addition to cross-media comparisons, evidence may be turned up by careful attention to the given newspaper or magazine being studied. The concern of the historian is not merely to demonstrate that an episode of

strategic silence occurred; rather, it is to make explicit the significance of what was omitted. Often this may require relating the episode to a given historical moment. Thus, the trail of strategic silence may be picked up from evidence that material was published before or after the particular instance under study.

One such instance emerged with startling clarity in my study of King and the news magazines. For several months in 1962, King was engaged in a major civil rights campaign in Albany, a small town in South Georgia. His strategy of nonviolent resistence was frustrated by the town's chief of police, Laurie Pritchett. Pritchett adopted a strategy of meeting nonviolence with nonviolence rather than with acts of violent and public repression. Thus was King denied the outpouring of favorable press coverage that eventually characterized his major campaigns in Birmingham in 1963 and in Selma two years later. The Albany movement ended as a major defeat for King, in part because Albany, unlike Birmingham and Selma, never achieved the symbolic clarity and intense public drama that would generate sympathetic media coverage.[13]

The campaign in Albany was covered in detail by Newsweek. In contrast to the other news magazines, Newsweek supported the reformist goals of the coalition led by King and consistently depicted Pritchett, despite his public professions of nonviolence, as the agent of a thoroughly oppressive system of segregation. King occupied the central symbolic position in the coverage of the magazine, as was entirely appropriate. What was striking, however, was Newsweek's silence after the conclusion of the campaign, when it had become undeniable that the Albany movement was all but an unmitigated disaster for King and his organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

A story published by Newsweek in the first week of 1963 was marked by strategic silence. The article examined the Albany movement and its consequences—more than a year of demonstrations, more than fifteen hundred arrests, and several deaths. It was a bleak picture replete with "signs of corrosive bitterness and frustrations." The picture also was incomplete; the story made no mention of King or the SCLC, an omission somewhat on the order or recapitulating the details of a major military battle without including the name of the general and army on the losing side. Obviously, Newsweek, which had gone to some extra lengths to support King's campaign in Albany, was taking extraordinary measures to protect his image afterward. A week after carefully writing King out of the history of the disastrous Albany movement, Newsweek wrote him into a more flattering role as the spokesman for American ideals on the one hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.[14]

Not all omissions are so clear-cut, nor does the evidence flow inevitably from material published before the episode under investigation. The evidence may appear because of what is published afterward as well. An example was the decision of U.S. News & World Report to publish, following King's assassination in 1968, excerpts from the "I Have a Dream" speech delivered by King during the March on Washington in 1963. In 1963, following its general pattern of hostility to King and what he stood for, U.S. News noted merely that King had momentarily stirred his audience with a clarion call for militancy. On that earlier occasion, the conservative magazine would not permit the sacred phrases of the Declaration of Independence to pass King's lips. Five years later, the situation had changed. After his death, King was reinterpreted by U.S. News as a symbol of affirmation of American society, rather than a threat to it, and it became entirely appropriate that he express

his faith in his country's ideals by quoting Jefferson's magnificent phrases.[15]

The availability of information to a given publication may also be inferred from evidence turned up by research into primary or secondary sources that parallels the analysis of texts.

An illustration of the evidence gleaned from primary sources emerged during my examination of the 1963 civil rights campaign in Birmingham.

After the debacle in Albany, King needed a victory badly. He and his aides correctly regarded Birmingham as the citadel of segregation, the toughest target in the South, but they pressed ahead with a civil rights campaign in that city recognizing, as the executive director of the SCLC remarked, that "we may not win, we may lose everything. But we knew that as Birmingham went, so would go the South."[16] So King went into Birmingham determined to press the struggle against segregation to the limit. He won a smashing victory by manuevering the fire and police commissioner, who passed into infamy as Bull Connor of Birmingham, into the violent public reprisals that Police Chief Pritchett had avoided so adroitly in Albany the year before.

However, several weeks passed before Bull Connor blundered into the trap. In the meantime, sharp criticism came from some quarters of the American media, including Time and Newsweek, which objected to King's refusal to stay his hand and negotiate with an incoming mayoral administration that was regarded as more reasonable and moderate than the political regime to which Connor belonged. Nor did King escape criticism for his tactics, especially deploying black schoolchildren in the forefront of the demonstration marches that eventually forced Bull Connor to take the gloves off.

Two incidents caught my eye, both arising after King's arrest during the period of uneasy manuevering before his strategy proved successful. King had successfully courted arrest in order to create a rallying point that would revive flagging enthusiasm among his followers and encourage more volunteers to come forward and participate in demonstrations designed to pack the jail facilities to the overflowing.

The first was a telephone call from President Kennedy to Mrs. King. Kennedy expressed his concern and assured her that she would be hearing from her husband. No mention of the call appeared in Time or Newsweek, although both had reported a similar call made by Kennedy as a presidential candidate in 1960 following another of King's arrests.

The first step was to establish that the information concerning the telephone call was available to Time and Newsweek. A cross-media comparison was available. But other evidence was found in archives. The Birmingham police department recorded a subsequent telephone conversation between King and his wife. Recognizing a good stroke of publicity in Kennedy's telephone call, King immediately instructed his wife twice to inform his aides of the call so they could get out an announcement to the news media. The transcript of the telephone conversation was supported by other archival evidence indicating that such an announcement probably was made.[17]

Time and Newsweek ignored the natural news peg on which to hang a reference, this being the telephone call Kennedy made in 1960. It did not suit their purposes, as it did those of U.S. News,[18] to establish a symbolic linkage between the president of the United States and King, not while King, as the two magazines maintained, was attempting to force an unnecessary crisis in Birmingham.

Their distaste for King's determination to create a confrontation also partially explains the stategic silence maintained by Time and Newsweek when it came to the single most famous document composed by King, his Letter from Birmingham Jail. There was another reason as well, one related to audience expectations. His Letter from Birmingham Jail contained this tart rejoinder to the counsel that he should follow the middle way of reason and compromise in Birmingham:

> I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with white moderates. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens' Council-er or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; . . . who paternalistically feels that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom. . . Shallow understanding from people of goodwill is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. . .[19]

Whether the middle-class--and moderate--audiences of Newsweek and Time wished to read that critical passage, the journals clearly preferred to spare them the burden of hearing themselves compared in any way to the segregationists with whom King was struggling in Birmingham. Newsweek did not publish the critical passages from the Letter, and perhaps used one or two much milder phrases, although even this could not be established with any certainty because of the brevity of the references. Time ignored the Letter altogether during the Birmingham campaign.

The difficulty of treating this as an episode of strategic silence appears in the claim by Time more than six months later that "in the tumble of events then and since" the Letter from Birmingham Jail "never got the notice it deserved." The implication was that there was very little publicity associated with the Letter, and that Time was now rectifying this unfortunate neglect of an important document. In fact, according to primary evidence from

the SCLC, the manifesto was circulated in numbers approaching a million copies before King was even released from the jail in which he wrote it.[20] With King emerged victorious in Birmingham, with the fame of his Letter spread across the nation, if not the world, with Time itself in need of raw material for a major cover story on him that was being assembled, there was every reason now to resurrect the Letter, although Time continued not to see those critical words about moderates and moderation.

Secondary as well as primary sources may also provide evidence that points to strategic silence. One such episode appeared during the Freedom Rides of 1961. The first Freedom Ride was begun by the Congress of Racial Equality, a small, biracial organization dedicated to the principles of nonviolence. It was conceived as a dramatic demonstration that segregation continued unabated in interstate transportation in the South despite a Supreme Court ruling that was more than a decade old, and was designed as well to bring pressure on the Kennedy administration finally to fulfill long-overdue campaign promises to take action to ensure the civil rights of black Southerners.[21]

A few days into the journey, the integrated busloads of Freedom Riders encountered mob violence in the South, especially in several cities in Alabama. One of the most dramatic incidents of the campaign took place in Montgomery, where King and approximately twelve hundred others were besieged in a black church by a howling mob kept at bay only by the timely, if last-minute intervention of United States marshals dispatched by Attorney General Kennedy. Following that incident, King declined an invitation from SNCC members, who had largely replaced the original contingent from CORE, to join a Freedom Ride that would be making a dangerous journey into Mississippi. "As

he put it, he had to choose the 'when and where of his Golgotha.' He also said he was on probation, and the ride would be a violation [of probation]. The SNCC people. . .were furious with him, and accused him of being yellow."[22] Not for the last time had King had a disputatious encounter with the impatient and militant cadres of SNCC.

King had a well-developed sense of caution, but he was no coward; had he been one and yet persisted in civil rights campaigns that required him to go in harm's way, he would have been a fool, and that King was not. Still, the point is not King's courage, but whether the incident would be reported by the news magazines that were sympathetic to King's civil rights movement. The first question was whether the information was available. Shedding considerable light on this question was the fact that, according to one of his biographers, King announced at a press conference the decision that occasioned angry denunciations from members of SNCC.[23] From the circumstances, it could be reasonably inferred that Newsweek and Time were aware of the incident, but chose not to report it. As further evidence, Time did indeed report the controversy during the Albany movement the following year:

> King began to lose status with young Negroes last May when he failed to take a Freedom Ride into Mississippi. He lost even more last month at a civil rights demonstration in Albany, Georgia, when he was taken off to jail vowing that he would stay behind bars indefinitely, then meekly posted bond and went home two days later.[24]

Although it is likely that both Time and Newsweek had access to the information about the controversy, the former is a special case because it published the information subsequently. Unless it took six months for Time's reporting staff--one of the best in American journalism--to stumble across campground gossip that King was a coward (the trail of the rumors having been laid down at a press conference), the reason for the strategic silence

probably comes down to symbolism. During the Freedom Ride crisis, Time was presenting a symbolically charged scenario of good and evil, justice and injustice, villains and heroes. The villain of that particular piece was Governor John Patterson of Alabama, who permitted mobs to run amok in his state, attacking civil rights demonstrators with impunity.

The situation in Albany was presented in a different light by Time. Albany lacked the drama and violence of the Freedom Rise, nor was there an easily rendered symbol of evil that could be sketched in stark tone; in fact, Time depicted Chief of Police Laurie Pritchett as an admirably efficient and even-handed officer of the law when, whatever his virtues, Pritchett was doing his utmost to prop up an oppressive system of racial segregation. Most importantly, because of Pritchett's strategy of meeting nonviolence with nonviolence, King clearly was losing the struggle in Albany. And that was unacceptable to Time, a magazine that celebrated success and carried no brief for losers of any sort.[25]

There are other ways of turning up evidence concerning the availability of information not used because of strategic silence. One is internal evidence within an article. An example of this was Newsweek's profile of King's widow following his assassination in 1968. Mrs. King was offered as a living example of the insults and injuries visited upon the Black Southerner:

> For Coretta King, serenity in the face of adversity was nothing unexpected. In a hundred painful explanations to her four children over the years--why whites called them "nigger," why they couldn't go to a segregated amusement park called "Fun Town," why God made some people colored--she had renewed her faith in her husband's gospel of tolerance.[26] [Emphasis added]

None of this was particularly startling, but an episode of strategic silence was buried in the excerpt. The reference to "Fun Town" actually appears in

King's Letter from Birmingham Jail. Why, therefore, was it not attributed to that document? The explanation probably is to be found in Newsweek's perceptions of the expectations of its readers.

Long before 1968, the Letter from Birmingham Jail had been enshrined as one of the civil rights movement's most enduring expressions of the yearning for freedom. However moving the description of the shattering impact of segregation upon black children, the tone of domesticity that enveloped the encounter with segregation at "Fun Town" would run contrary to readers' expectations that the Letter from Birmingham Jail would not deviate from a philosophical tenor. It would be quite appropriate, on the other hand, for a journalistic profile of King's widow.[27]

The treatment of strategic silence also requires close attention to other factors related to the general characteristics and procedures of American journalism, the particular medium being studied, and the distinguishing characteristics of the individual newspaper, magazine, or broadcasting station.

Another episode from the Albany movement illustrates the necessity of paying close attention to the practices of American journalism. In July of 1962, King and his associate, Ralph David Abernathy, were tried in Albany on criminal charges brought about six months before. They were convicted and ordered to pay fines or serve forty-five days in jail. They chose the latter penalty. However, an unidentified person, described by Police Chief Pritchett as a well-dressed black man, paid their fines, then vanished. As a result, King and Abernathy, "who were anxious to remain in jail as a symbol of Negro resistance, were forcibly ejected from their cells."[28]

In order to develop its theme, U.S. News effectively ruled out consideration of this question: How was it that King came to be released? (Almost in passing, the magazine quoted King's disclaimer, which was disingenuous in tone: "'I don't know who paid it. We didn't want to leave.'"[29]) The question was so obvious that even the greenest of cub reporters could scarcely have missed it--and if a reporter for a national publication had missed it, his supervising editors almost certainly would have seized it.

To be sure, there are dangers in making assumptions about actions, motivations, and abilities. As Richard Beringer notes in a related context, the idea that people know their own best interests has been disproved for large segments of the population by generations of con men, high-interest loan companies, and slick advertising men.[30]

Yet silence reverberates in this instance against patterns of content. There was a reason for U.S. News not to seize upon that critical question. Strategic silence enabled the magazine to leave open the possibility that the Kennedy administration had paid the fine as a political move. Then the magazine converted possibility into probability with the statement that "the flurry of activity recalled the intercession of the President--then a candidate--when Dr. King was jailed in 1960."[31] Thus unfolded in print an incident that perfectly matched one of the magazine's recurring themes, this being that the Southern civil rights movement was fostered by an unconstitutional conspiracy of black leaders and high-ranking officials of the federal government.

The peculiarities of the medium being studied must also be considered. Some are so obvious as to merit only passing reference: television's

incessant demand for stories that can be presented visually; the multiple editions published by most metropolitan newspapers in which content will appear in some editions designed for certain geographically defined audiences but not others;[32] deadline schedules; and, in the case of the news magazines, even the mundane but occasionally critical problem of postdated issues.[33]

Two instances of strategic silence illustrate the point in the particular context of the news magazines' obsessive marshalling of facts. The news magazines do not, of course, provide news in the strictest sense; it is assumed that readers have been informed of news events first by other media, whether print or broadcast. The news magazines interpret the news—or, more accurately, make sense of it from a given perspective, that of a middle-class audience. Toward this end, the use of telling details, as in minutae of dress, mannerisms, and other assorted scraps of narrative drama, are critically important. Facts are used extensively to illustrate a dramatic thesis and because of the assumption that readers infer knowledge of larger matters from seemingly insignificant bits of information that are the building blocks of the news magazines' stories.[34]

One of the bits of information had to do with King's study of Marx, which Time twice omitted from its pages, once after the Montgomery bus boycott and again in 1968 following King's assassination. What made the silence all the more intriguing was that Time provided in its first story a name-by-name listing of the social philosophers and theorists studied by King in university or seminary courses.[35] It was a small omission, but one not lacking in significance. Adding Marx to the list in 1957, when McCarthyism (though not Joseph McCarthy) was still a force to be reckoned with in American society, would have required either a forthright denunciation of Marxist thought by

King, which he apparently would be unwilling to supply, or a lengthy explanation that might be unsatisfactory to middle-class readers with scant tolerance for radicalism generally and none at all for the Marxist strain.

It is possible, though unlikely, that King's study of Marx was a fact that eluded Time's net when the research was done for the story published in 1957. By 1968, there could be no doubt about it. As early as 1958, King discussed Marxist ideas in his first book, written after the conclusion of the Montgomery bus boycott.[36]

The second example is more subtle. It appears in a statement by Newsweek that only a "symbolic smattering" of whites, American Indians, and Hispanic Americans had traveled to Washington to join the Poor People's Campaign that King set in motion before his death. The statement was incorrect. More to the point, it was uncharacteristically vague for a news magazine, and, furthermore, it was the type of information that could have been easily gathered.[37]

Thoroughness of reporting was demanded of Newsweek's reporting staff, as is illustrated by an anecdote recorded by a former editor of the magazine. A correspondent was supplying information for a story in the religion section about a dispute between a Catholic archbishop and a parishioner excommunicated during a school desegregation controversy in New Orleans in 1962. An editor named Emerson called the Newsweek reporter seeking answers to "just two questions":

> "Number one," he said, "what does the archbishop's house look like? Is it wood, or stone, or brick? Is it Victorian with ivy on the walls? What kind of day was it? Was it balmy and overcast, or hot and muggy? What does the archbishop look like? Is he old and bespectacled or what? How did he walk when he came out of the house? Did he stride angrily? Or did he walk haltingly, leaning on a cane? How was he dressed? What do the grounds look like? Are there oak trees and rose bushes, magnolias and poppies? Were birds singing in the bushes? What was going on in the

> street outside the house? Was an angry crowd assembled? Or was there the normal business traffic, passing by oblivious to the drama inside? What were Mrs. Gaillot [the parishioner] and her friends wearing? Did they have on Sunday best or just casual clothes? What happened when the archbishop confronted Mrs. Gaillot? Was he stern and silent? Or did he rebuke her? What was the exact language she used?
> "Now," Emerson said, "question number two. . . [38]

Why Newsweek maintained a strategic silence about the number of non-black participants in the campaign can be traced to what King was attempting to do before his death, the organization of the Poor People's Campaign in Washington with which King intended to force the national government and the white power structure of America to delivery economic justice to the poor. As it turned out, it was the last campaign King set in motion; he was assassinated in Memphis before the movement could actually be begun. The Poor People's Campaign was intended to be King's most ambitious and most radical undertaking. The radicalism appears, among other elements, in the structuring of the Poor People's Campaign along lines of class. Newsweek was determined, however, to preserve King's image as a reformer, not to underscore the radicalism that had marked his activism since the conclusion of the Selma campaign in 1965. And few things would have been more radical at the time—thus more damaging to that image—than a praxis derived from Marx, and fewer still a practical demonstration that a social movement organized along class lines seemed to be gathering support that went beyond a "symbolic smattering." It was, of course, another small detail, but of such tiny chips were the narratives of the news magazines constructed, harmonizing the toss and tumble of news events with audience expectations.

Finally, the distinguishing characteristics of the particular media organization must figure in the search for strategic silence. Examples drawn

from the reportage of Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report will illustrate the analytical process.

After its purchase by the Washington Post Company in 1961, Newsweek started to make its name as the news magazine most sympathetic to black aspirations and most sensitive to the need for social and political reform generally; that editorial line continued at least through the end of the decade. However, Newsweek's patience was sorely tried in the years between 1964 and 1969 by the increasing radicalization of the black movement and the consequent shattering of the liberal alliance that had coalesced around the civil rights cause. On numerous occasions since 1966, despite mounting evidence to the contrary, Newsweek had gamely tried to maintain that the liberal coalition was vital rather than moribund.

In 1968, Newsweek was presented with undeniable evidence of a coalition that reproduced many of the organizational dynamics of the old liberal alliance. It emerged during a garbage strike in Memphis, in which King became inadvertently enmeshed a few days before his death. An effective working coalition was forged by the black clergy of Memphis and the national leadership of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Although the coalition was the most striking organizational facet of that strike, strangely enough its existence went unrecorded by Newsweek. Aside from the journal's wistful propensity to find evidence of the revitalization of the old liberal coalition in all sorts of unlikely events, the coalition in Memphis normally would have been reported because it was so visible that it could hardly have escaped notice, and, as well, the standards of national journalism required reporting the AFSCME's role in the strike as a matter of course.

The most likely explanation of the omission is to be found in the thrust of the coverage of the magazine following the assassination of King during the strike. By passing over the very considerable role of the national union, including its highly visible president, Jerry Wurf, who for a short period conducted negotiations with the city administration on behalf of the striking garbage collectors, Newsweek kept intact the clarity of the symbolic situation. And this was that King had come to the aid of the lowliest of the low, the black garbage collectors, rather than that he also had entered into an alliance with a large and aggressive national union with a membership numbering 375,000 by 1968.[39]

It was important that the symbolism of King's leadership of oppressed Southern blacks in a struggle against oppressive white segregationists be unclouded by nuance. After the assassination, Newsweek, as well as the other two news magazines, stripped away elements of King's later radicalism and fixed the meaning of his time on the public stage essentially in terms of his reformist activities.[40]

Quite similar was the uncharacteristic reticence of U.S. News & World Report during the Poor People's Campaign in Washington in 1968. One major element of its coverage is indicated by the headline attached to an article: "Communist Influence in March on Washington?" Punctuation notwithstanding, the magazine seemed certain enough of the answer. Far more striking was what U.S. News did not report. It did not, in fine, dredge up the accusations that King was a Communist or the dupe of Communists which had recurred in its reports since 1964.[41]

The episode needs to be put in perspective. The point is not that U.S. News should have re-used the accusations that King was a Communist, but that

it had departed abruptly from its way of dealing with King in the past. Remaining silent, U.S. News sacrificed the opportunity, as it seldom did, to offer genuine and cut-to-fit evidence that would have buttressed its thesis. On top of that, U.S. News was depriving itself of powerful ammunition just at the moment when it was casting about for every possible weapon with which to attack the Poor People's Campaign. What it gained was more important. After King's death, the magazine reinterpreted him a vital symbol of moderation and order in American society rather than as a threat to it. King was far too valuable in the symbolic capacity to be discarded.

Conclusion

This discussion of strategic silence in texts is, of course, exploratory rather than definitive. It was undertaken with two interrelated purposes in mind. The first was that there was a need to stimulate debate about a little-explored element of textual analysis, and this required attention to the question of why an obvious principle should be neglected. Not least of the reasons why this should be so is the awkward position occupied by textual analysis, caught in the fluctuating boundaries between history and the social sciences. The second was to offer concrete examples, drawn from my own research, that illustrate the problems, first of locating, then of fixing the significance of information or facts that do not appear in media content. Put another way, the paper attempts to demonstrate the process of putting omitted content within a historical context.

By no means do the examples provided and the principles from historical methodology discussed in the paper exhaust the potential range in either instance. Nor, it must be conceded, are the examples completely illustrative even of the historical reasoning brought to bear upon the specific problem of

the symbolic presentations of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., by the news magazines. Lest the methodological discussion be overshadowed, it was necessary to compress judgments that draw upon a number of sources for evidence and usually employ several rather than one of the procedures outlined in the paper. Nevertheless, the paper serves as a starting point.

In the end, history comes down to an argument. What this paper attempts to do is set forth some of the procedures and standards that ought to underlie the particular argument about gaps appearing in media content. In this, I follow the spirit of Stuart Hall's admonition that the textual analyst should indicate why one reading of a text is more plausible than another. Thereafter, to borrow another phrase from Todd Gitlin, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

NOTES

[1]Richard W. Budd, Robert K. Thorp, and Lewis Donohew, Content Analysis of Communication (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p.46.

[2]Here I pass over as digressive the debate over whether content analysis can or should be concerned with latent meanings.

[3]Stuart Hall, "Introduction" to Paper Voices: The Popular Press and Social Change, 1935-1965, by A.C.H. Smith with Elizabeth Immirzi and Trevor Blackwell (London: Chatto and Windhus, 1975), p. 15.

[4]Todd Gitlin, The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media the Making and Unmaking of the New Left (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 303.

[5]Hall, P.15.

[6]Quoted in Richard E. Beringer, Historical Analysis: Contemporary Approaches to Clio's Craft (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), p. 200.

[7]H. Stuart Hughes, History as Art and as Science: Twin Vistas on the Past (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1964, p. 93.

[8]The ceremonial signing of the 1965 Voting Rights Act is described in Newsweek, "A Barrier Falls: The U.S. Negro Moves to Vote," 16 August 1965, P. 15. On King's participation in that event, see David L. Lewis, King: A Biography, 2nd edit. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 303. Newsweek's account of the 1964 ceremony appears in "'. . .Shall Now Also Be Equal. . .," 13 July 1964, p. 17.

[9]U.S. News & World Report, "Shifting Patterns in Race Problem," 23 August 1965, p. 37. It should be noted, however, that the magazine, in this story, did counterpose King symbolically against black groups such as the Deacons for Defense, which espoused armed self-defense.

[10]The literature of which is far too voluminous to treat adequately in this paper. See, e.g., Leon V. Sigal, Reporters and Officials: The Organization and Politics of Newsmaking(Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath, 1973); Bernard Roscho, Newsmaking (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Gaye Tuchman, Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality(New York: The Free Press, 1978), and Herbert J. Gans, Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time (New York: Vintage Books, 1979)

[11]See Gitlin, pp. 299-300, for a summary of literature relating to the influence exercised by the Times in American journalism.

[12]New York Times, 11 December 1964, p. 33. Cf., Newsweek, "Up from Montgomery," 21 December 1964, p. 41; Time, "Two Perspectives--One Goal," 18 December 1964, p. 21.

[13]For good contemporary accounts of the campaign, see Howard Zinn, Albany: A Study in National Responsibility (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1962) and SNCC: The New Abolitionists (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).

[14]Newsweek, "Albany Revisited," 7 January 1963, p. 18, and "The Wall," 14 January 1963, p. 27.

[15]See U.S. News & World Report, "As 200,000 Marched in Washington--"9 September 1963, p. 40, and "Even If I Die in the Struggle--" 15 April 1968, p. 33.

[16]Interview with Wyatt Tee Walker, 11 October 1967, New York City. Oral History Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington. Transcript of tape 56, p. 52.

[17]See untitled transcript of telephone conversation, n.d. [April, 1963]. The SCLC almost certainly did relay word of Kennedy's call to reporters. At a civil rights rally on April 15, Wyatt Tee Walker announced to the crowd that Kennedy had made the call to Mrs. King. See Detectives B.A. Allison and R.A. Watkins to Chief of Police Jamie Moore. Both documents are in the Eugene Connor papers, Birmingham Public Library, Box 13, File 3.

[18]In fact, U.S. News & World Report was eager to report the call, which buttressed a recurring theme discussed infra and added the detail that a second call to Mrs. King was placed by the president's brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. See "As Racial Conflicts Broke Out Anew--" 29 April 1963, p. 8.

[19]A copy of the original Letter from Birmingham Jail, King to Bishop C.C.J. Carpenter et al., 16 April 1963, is in the William C. Hamilton papers, Birmingham Public Library, uncatalogued.

[20]Time, "Man of the year: Never Again Where He Was," 3 January 1964, p. 15. On the SCLC's intensive campaign to circulate copies of the epistle, see Andrew J. Young, "And Birmingham," Drum Major, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter, 1971): 26. Copy held in the Labadie Collection, University of Michigan Library, Ann Arbor. See also, Haig Bosmajian, "The Letter from Birmingham Jail," in C. Eric Lincoln, ed., Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Profile (New York: Hill and Wang, 1970), p. 129.

[21]See, e.g., Milton Viorst, Fire in the Streets: America in the 1960s (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), p. 128; Harris Wofford, Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), pp. 127, 156.

[22]The statement made by James Farmer, then director of CORE, is quoted in Viorst, p. 156. See also, Stephen B. Oates, Let the Trumpet Sound: The Life of Martin Luther King, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 176-177.

[23]The press conference is mentioned by Oates, p. 176.

[24]Time, "Confused Crusade," 12 January 1962, p. 15.

[25]In which Time apparently followed the bent of its co-founder, Henry Luce. On Luce's preoccupation with success, see W.A. Swanberg, Luce and His Empire (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), pp. 428-429.

[26]Newsweek, "You're Such a Brave Lady. . .!" 22 April 1968, p.32.

[27]See King to Carpenter [Letter from Birmingham Jail], pp. 6-7. For a discussion of the news magazines and readers' expectations, see Gans, pp. 131, 219, and, more generally, Hall, p. 23. This was far from the only instance that Newsweek adroitly used silence at strategic points in order to burnish King's image. For example, it reported after King's death that he had devoted his considerable earnings as a writer and speaker and his cash prize of $50,000 from the Nobel Foundation to the black cause. It listed two organizations that benefited from King's largess: Morehouse College, from which King was graduated, and Ebenezer Baptist Church, which King served as assistant pastor. All this was accurate. What was interesting was Newsweek's silence about other recepients of King's generosity, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Congress of Racial Equality. SNCC and CORE each received part of the money distributed by King from the Nobel Prize. In 1964, SNCC and CORE were both in the mainstream of the civil rights movement. By 1968, however, both had embraced the separatist Black Power ideology that was anathema to Newsweek. By omitting the fact of King's earlier contributions, Newsweek could disassociate King from SNCC and CORE without engaging in a lengthy explanation of the movement of the two civil rights organizations into the radicalism of Black Power. See "Newsmaker," 27 May 1968, p. 56.

[28]The quotation is from William M. Kunstler, Deep in My Heart (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1966), pp. 98-99. See also, Zinn, Albany, pp. 5-7.

[29]U.S. News & World Report, "When Dr. King Went to Jail Again," 23 July 1962, p. 10.

[30]Beringer, p. 312.

[31]U.S. News & World Report, "When Dr. King Went to Jail Again," 23 July 1962, p. 10. Both Time and Newsweek reported that King's release was engineered by the powers-that-be of Albany in order to deny King the martyrdom of remaining in jail. The interpretation was basically confirmed many years later by Police Chief Pritchett. See Howell Raines, My Soul is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), pp. 399-400. The point to be grasped, however, was that the question of how King was released could scarcely be overlooked at the time.

[32]Commonly, only the final city edition of a newspaper is microfilmed; relying upon microfilmed copies may skew the results if, for example, the issue is one that would be of interest primarily to the readers in districts

outside the metropolitan circulation zone. Gitlin, p. 301, mentions this in passing. For cautionary illustrations of how results might be skewed in a specific context, that of a newspaper circulated in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi, see Hugh Davis Graham, Crisis in Print: Desegregation and the Press in Tennessee (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), p. 37, and Frank Smith, Congressman from Mississippi(New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), p. 253.

[33]On the practice of post-dating issues, see T.S. Matthews, Name and Address (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), p. 261. Matthews, formerly an editor of Time, noted that the theory went that buyers would be depressed if they purchased a magazine bearing the same date as the date of purchase, or even a day or two before. Obviously, relying upon the date printed on a news magazine while searching for instances of strategic silence requires careful attention to the chronology of events and the availability of evidence.

[34]The liveliest exploration of the use of facts by the news magazines is Otto Friedrich, "There are 00 Trees in Russia: The Function of Facts in the Newsmagazines," Harper's Magazine, October, 1964, pp. 59-65, see esp. p. 62.

[35]See Time, "Attack on the Conscience," 18 February 1957, p. 17.

[36]See Martin Luther King, Jr., Stride-Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story (New York: Harper & Row), pp. 94-95. King's belief in a synthesis of capitalism and "collective enterprise" as the answer to social and economic problems no doubt was unpalatable to Time. The reference to King's study of Marx would have been entirely appropriate journalistically in 1968, if for no other reason than the organization along class lines of the Poor People's Campaign. At any other time the instance of strategic silence would have been less glaring, but incidental references to King appeared after his death in the most unlikely stories, including those about broadcasting, religion, riots and insurance, and Wall Street, as well as more pertinent articles such as Time's essay on "Violence in History," 19 April 1968, pp. 44-46.

[37]Those officials of the Poor People's Campaign in a position to know estimated that, of the approximately three thousand participants, more than four hundred were Hispanic Americans and another four to five hundred were whites from Appalachia. See interviews with Richard Romero, Western coordinator of the Poor People's Campaign, 11 June 1968, transcripts of tape 193, p. 15, and Ernest Austin, Appalachian coordinator, 9 July 1968, transcript of tape 264, p. 9. Inasmuch as Hispanics, Indians, and whites were housed in separate quarters, the information about their numbers should have been easy enough to secure. Austin interview, p. 25. Both transcripts are in the oral history collection of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington.

[38]Quoted in Osborn Elliott, The World of Oz (New York: The Viking Press, 1980), p. 55, n. While the tale has an apocryphal ring, a comparison of the inquiries of editor Emerson and typical news magazine stories demonstrates that it has considerable foundation in fact.

[39]"Public Employee Unions," American Labor, June, 1968, p. 23, records the membership of the AFSCME in 1968. See also, Richard Lentz, "Sixty-five Days in Memphis: The Commercial Appeal, the Press-Scimitar, and the 1968 Garbage Strike" (M.A. thesis, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1976), pp. 27-32.

[40]For a full development of this thesis, see Richard Lentz, "Resurrecting the Prophet: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the News Magazines" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Iowa, 1983), Chapters 15-17.

[41]See Richard Lentz, "The Mutable Prophet: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Echo Chamber Campaign of U.S. News & World Report, 1964-1968," a paper presented to the Qualitative Studies Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, August 5-7, 1984, Gainesville, Florida.